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UNCLAS TEL AVIV 000712

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

DEPT FOR NEA/RA, NEA/IPA, AND OES/SCI

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: POLLUTED MOUNTAIN AQUIFER BINDS PALESTINIANS AND  
ISRAELIS

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED - PLEASE HANDLE ACCORDINGLY.

Consulate General Jerusalem has cleared this message.

1. (SBU) Summary: A recent symposium on pollution of shared Israeli-Palestinian groundwater highlighted that sewage and untreated solid waste seriously threaten the health of the Mountain Aquifer which provides water to Palestinians, Israeli settlers on the West Bank, and other Israeli citizens in Green Line Israel. Most solid waste and sewage is not treated at all, though international donors have developed plans to address many of the most pressing pollution problems. Israeli officials at the symposium urged donors to move forward with such projects despite the Hamas electoral victory January 25, though they noted that GOI policy precluded working with Hamas. The Israeli officials' promotion of sewage and solid waste projects reflected the humanitarian nature of such projects, plus the reality that the Aquifer is of critical importance to Israelis as well as Palestinians. End summary.

2. (U) Friends of the Earth Middle East (FOEME/EcoPeace) sponsored a Symposium "Pollution of the Mountain Aquifer: Threats, Obstacles and Solutions," in Jerusalem January 31. FOEME Israel Director Gidon Bromberg noted that Israeli-Palestinian cooperation on water projects had continued even during the recent Intifada, but such cooperation had not occurred on treatment of solid waste. One of the co-authors of FOEME reports on pollution of the shared Mountain Aquifer by sewage and solid waste stated that the Aquifer provides 600 million cubic meters (MCM) of renewable water per year, serving 2.3 million Palestinians, 235,000 Israeli settlers, and 500,000 in Israel proper.

3. (U) Several speakers described the low degree of treatment of solid waste and sewage on the West Bank (the Aquifer sits under most of the West Bank and part of Green Line Israel), but also how the establishment of proper waste disposal sites and sewage treatment could greatly reduce pollution of the Aquifer. A representative of the World Bank pointed out that there are almost 1,000 random dump sites at present. GOI representatives highlighted the lack of special handling for hazardous and medical wastes. Beni el-Baz, head of Environmental Coordination for the Civil Administration, stressed the critical importance of protecting the Aquifer for future generations. Ilan Nissim of the GOI Ministry of Environment joined el-Baz in saying that the creation of sanitary landfills for Ramallah, Hebron, Nablus and other population centers in the West Bank was a vital concern for Israelis as well as Palestinians. Both officials urged donors to find a way to address pollution concerns despite worries about the recent election results. Donor representatives mentioned the possible need to find NGOs to work with donors on waste treatment projects. The FOEME reports and donor presentations showed that donors had developed plans to address many of the outstanding sewage and solid waste concerns.

4 (SBU) Comment: It was striking that the Israeli officials at the symposium were so proactive in urging donors to address pollution problems in the West Bank, despite the recent electoral victory by Hamas. That emphasis represents not only the humanitarian nature of sewage and solid waste problems, but also the fact that the Mountain Aquifer is such an important source of fresh water for Israel. End comment.

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JONES